8: Richards E-5 (1930-1934) 1937 FQ5 Bemba FQ5

000

MAN

A MONTHLY RECORD OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL SCIENCE.

PUBLISHED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE

ROYAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL INSTITUTE

OF

GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND.

XXXVII.

1937.

Nos. 1—237.

WITH PLATES A—M.

Published by
THE ROYAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL INSTITUTE, 52, UPPER BEDFORD PLACE, LONDON W.C.1.
General Agent: FRANCIS EDWARDS, 83, High Street, Marylebone, W.1.
New York Agents: Messrs. G. E. STECHERT & Co.
And to be obtained of all Booksellers.

[title page]

8: Richards E-5 (1930-1934) 1937 FQ5 Bemba FQ5

RECIPROCAL CLAN RELATIONSHIPS AMONG THE BEMBA OF N.E. RHODESIA. *By A. I. Richards.*

000

[p. 188(A)]

8: Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1937
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

616 171 **222** Opposite clans performing reciprocal ritual duties and standing in a joking relationship to each other have been reported among several of the Central Bantu tribes,[1] but the distribution of this type of clan organization in Central and East Africa is as yet unknown, and the whole phenomenon has never been fully described to my knowledge. I am therefore publishing the following notes on the *Banungwe*,[2] or opposite clans of the Bemba of N.E. Rhodesia in the hope of eliciting further comparative information on the subject.

614 The Bemba are divided into forty or more exogamous matrilineal clans (*mukoa*) tracing descent through the mother to some original ancestor or ancestress, a more or less legendary figure dating from the time of the first occupation of the present territory of the Bemba two

[1] *Cf. Awalongo* of the Lamba. C. Doke, *The Lambas of N. Rhodesia*, 1931, p. 197, and the *Banungwe* of the Bakaonde. F. H. Melland, *In Witch-bound Africa*, 1923, pp. 251–53.

[2] E. B. H. Goodall, late Provincial Commissioner of the Ndola area, wrote a short descriptive note on the *Banungwe* in *Some Wemba Words*, 1921, p. 75, and I would like here to pay tribute to the value of the ethnological material contained in this small vocabulary. It must be only a fraction of the author's very wide knowledge of Bemba customs, of which his recent sudden death deprived us. *Cf.* also my reference to the *Banungwe* in 'Preliminary Notes on the Babemba of N.E. Rhodesia,' *Bantu Studies*, September, 1935.

[p. 188(B)]

8: Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1937
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

614 to three hundred years ago. Membership of a *mukoa* determines a man's legal affiliation, his descent, and his succession to the name and status of dead relatives, or to particular offices, ritual or political. It gives him certain rights to hospitality and support.

614 The distinguishing mark of clan membership is the use of the *mukoa* name. A man describes himself as a *mwina* (plural *bena*) or a member 186 of such and such a clan (*e.g.*, *mwina nkalamo*, 195 a member of the lion clan).[3] Besides its title the clan possesses its own 'praise-names,' to give the English term used for such honorific terms of address as the *Sibongo* of the Southern Bantu. These praise-names are phrases making reference, usually in boastful language, to the names of the first, or most famous ancestors of the clan, or mentioning an incident in its early history, or the attributes considered to belong to its members. Such sentences are used in greetings, in jokes between members of different [537] clans, or in public declamations before a *mukoa* head on some ceremonial occasion, usually at the court of the Paramount chief. The *mukoa*

[3] The same word *mwina* is used to describe the subject of a chief, the inhabitant of a district, or the consort of a man or woman. In the western part of the district and in the Katanga area of the Belgian Congo, *Bena* is used to preface tribal names as distinct from clan names, *e.g.*, *Bena Cishinga* in the Bangweolu district, or the *Bena Kalundwe* in the Katanga area, *cf.* E. Verhulpen, *Baluba et Balubaises*, 1936.

[p. 188(C)]

614 186 195 praise-names are very similar to those shouted in honour of a chief on formal occasions or used as titles of address to him, and these phrases, preserved exactly in traditional form, and often expressed in archaic language, appear to be characteristic of Bantu chieftainship and clan system. Malinowski has shown in a typical Melanesian society how the myths of a clan origin, 'owned' and recounted by its members, form a recognized charter for the exercise of legal privileges such as rights of occupation of land or ritual prerogatives, and it is quite [773] probable that among Bantu, where myths, in the sense of tales of the miraculous doings of clan heroes are rare, yet the recitation of the names of clan or chiefly ancestors, the repetition of stories of their lives, or the shouting of a key sentence or proverb from such tales may fulfil very similar sociological functions.

614 [616] It is the name of the Bemba *mukoa* and the story of its acquisition by a special lineage group that provides the basis for the pairing of opposite clans, or *banungwe*. The clan names are those of a variety of objects, animal, plants, meteorological phenomena such as rain, parts of the human body, and even cultural activities such as funeral lamentations. [192] The most common are the following:—crocodile (*ngandu** or *ngwena*—the royal clan), fish (*sabi*, or in the Bisa country *tembo*), lion (*nkalamo*), leopard (*ngo**), otter (*mbao*), rat (*mpuku*), frog (*luo*), bees (*kashimu*), elephant (*nsofu*), wild pig (*ngulube* or *Cabala** or *nama*), tortoise (*Nkamba*), goat (*mbushi*), dog (*mbwa*), honey-bird (*nguni*): millet (*besa**), porridge (*bwali*), mushroom (3 clans—*boa*, the ordinary word for mushroom, *mwansa*, a special type of mushroom, and *ngona*, the Bisa mushroom clan), grass (*kani*, diminutive of *cani*), gourd (*lunda*), castor-oil seed (*mono*), wild loquat (*mumba** or *Cilufya*), tree or drum clan (*ngoma* or *muti* in Bisa country), beans (*nkanda**): iron (*mbulo*), rain (*mfula*), anthill (*culu*), male genitals (*membe*), female genitals (*nkashi*), lamentations (*nkonde** 614 or *misoa*), pot (*inongo*). It is interesting to note 171 that some of the names are words no longer in common use, *i.e.*, those marked with an asterisk, and that the majority of these titles are found widely spread among those Rhodesian tribes which claim an origin from the Luba-speaking peoples in the Congo, such as the Kaonde, Bisa, Ushi, Unga, etc. This is especially true of the

8: Richards E-5 (1930-1934) 1937
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

614
[171] oldest clan names (*bwali*, *ngandu*, *sabi*, *ngulube*, *boa*, *ngoma*, *mumba*, etc.)[5]

Some of these *mukoa* names are accounted for by a story describing the original splitting off of a lineage group to form a new clan. For instance, natives say that the ancestors of the lamentations clan (*nkonde*) were once members of the wild loquat clan (*mumba*) who had settled far away from the parent village. One of their members died but the rest of the *Bena mumba* refused to come and wail at the funeral. Hence a split took place between the two groups, and the younger branch declared, 'We must wail for 'ourselves now. Truly we are a clan of mourners.' Other stories are so uncomplimentary that they are narrated only by members of other clans, *e.g.*, that of the mushroom clan (*Ngona*), the royal clan of the Bisa, said by some to describe the splitting off of the Bemba proper from the Bisa during the original migration into the country. In this instance the ancestress of the present mushroom clan refused food to a hungry child of the royal or crocodile clan of the Bemba, declaring the pot she carried on her head was empty. But she stumbled and fell and the pot rolled off her head and was shown to be full of mushrooms. Hence, so the Bemba Paramount chief declares, 'We said; You clear off now and 'leave us alone. You have refused our child food. 'We call you the mushroom people now.'

Other *mukoa* names are actually those of the original ancestor of the clan itself, usually used as an alternative title, *e.g.*, Cilufya, an ancestor of the wild loquat clan, and a name less commonly used for it. In some cases I could get no story of the origin of the clan names.

614
616 The *banungwe* of each clan are those whose object 'by its nature is hostile to or dependent 'on or complementary to one's own.'[6] For instance, the crocodile and fish clans are *banungwe* to each other since crocodiles live on fish; the

[5] The *Mukoka* or matrilineal clans of the Lamba include 15 of the same clan names. *Cf. vide* Doke, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

I have not used the word 'totem' for these clan-name objects since the use of the *mukoa* name is not associated with any special cult of the animal or plant, with a taboo on its use, legends of descent from the object, or identification of the clan members with the species of animal or plant, or indeed any of the features considered characteristic of totemism as described in such classical areas as Australia, or N. America.

[6] E. B. H. Goodall, *loc. cit.* Some identical pairs are recorded by Doke among the Lamba, *op. cit.* p. 197.

614 mushroom and rain clans are similarly paired
616 since mushrooms cannot grow without rain; the porridge and the pot are equally essential to each other.

It will be seen that as it exists at the present day, this system of opposite or complementary clans can hardly be described as a form of dual organization, since each *mukoa* is not systematically paired, but has often a number of different partners linked by the apparently arbitrary factor of the clan name. The man's and the woman's clans are separately paired, it is true, and each has no other *banungwe*, but the rain clan (*mfula*) counts as its opposite numbers all the clans with plant names (the millet clans, the gourd, the mushroom clans, the grass, the tree, etc.) since plants cannot grow without rain. The fish clan members are also *banungwe* to the rain people, since fish only spawn when the rain has begun to fall. The iron people reckon themselves *banungwe* to members of all clans with the names of animals hunted or killed with iron spears or arrows, *i.e.*, the elephant, lion, leopard, etc. The animal clans also have reciprocal relations not only with the iron people, but with any *mukoa* named after an animal smaller than itself which forms its prey (*e.g.*, the lion and goat) or with the vegetable names in the case of a herbivorous species (*e.g.*, elephant and grass, etc.). The members of the mourning clan laughingly assert they are *banungwe* of all the clans since they are experts in mortuary ritual! —one of the reciprocal functions performed by *banungwe*.

614 What are the reciprocal functions the *banungwe*
616 perform for each other? Their ceremonial duties
T4 are chiefly confined to funeral rites.[7] The *banungwe* of a dead man's family both help and harass him at the burial ceremony. When the mourner's party has set off with the corpse to the grave-yard a man and a woman of any of the opposite clans remain behind to whitewash the hut contaminated by the touch of death, and to open the door for the wailers as they return. This is an unpleasant duty since contact with death necessitates subsequent purification. It is, moreover, a task which cannot be performed by members of the dead man's own clan. When the burial is over and the question of inheritance

[7] It is interesting to note that the legends of origin of the Lamba *mukoa* usually refer to the behaviour of the clan ancestors on their return from a funeral. C. Doke, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

[p. 190(A)]

614 has finally been settled the *banungwe* are again
616 essential. They have also to brew the beer for
764 the feast held for the kinsmen on such occasions. Besides these necessary ritual functions which people perform for their *banungwe*, they also taunt them at the funeral, irritate them and make jokes. Some of the opposite clan members must follow the burial party to the grave. The moment the body has been buried and earth piled over it in a mound, one of the *banungwe* breaks the silence with a sudden shout. He rails at the mourning family, mocks at them, and accuses them of having buried a live man. He calls out, 'You, there! Why do you bury a man 'who is alive? Listen to him knocking down 'there! Can't you hear him? He is asking 'for some snuff. You enemies, you! (the usual 'term applied by *banungwe* to each other). See 'what things you do! You go and bury live 'men!' The taunts are, of course, expected, but were received, at each funeral I attended, with a kind of horrified silence, till suddenly the tension broke, and the mourners who had been wailing for some six hours without break, began sheepishly to laugh, and broke into an unceremonious run back to the village, still pursued by shouts from the irrepressible *banungwe*, 'Look 'out you now! He has risen (*Kubuka*) from 'the grave, that man you buried. He is coming 'after you asking for porridge.'[8] Older natives say that the mourners were beaten by their *banungwe* in the old days and add that the latter [428] were also responsible for handing over to the heirs the insignia of inheritance—the bow of the dead man, or the belt of the woman—but I never saw either of these customs practised myself.

614 As ritually expressed the traditional attitude
616 between *banungwe* is therefore one of hostility,
522 and yet, as the complementary nature of the clan names imply, one of reciprocal service. *Banungwe* regularly address each other as 'You, 'my enemy!' (*Mwe mulwani mwe!*) and delight in laughter at the habits of the objects, whether animal or plant, of the opposite clan. A member of the crocodile clan will scoff at one of the fish people and deride him as, 'You! You are just 'my food ration!' (*poso*, the word used for a government ration given to employees). 'Come 'over here! I want to give you to my wife to 'cook.' The *munungwe* of the fish clan retaliates

[775]

[8] The word *kubuka* is that used for a dead man's spirit which returns to haunt the living (a *cisa*).

[p. 190(B)]

8: Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1937
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

614
616
522
[793]

with a derisive imitation of the slow ungainly walk of the crocodile and compares its gait with the speed of the fish. At the court of the Paramount Chief this type of joking relationship has been formalized, and the head of the fish clan, a *mukubilo*, or hereditary priest of the tribal ancestral spirits, must dramatize the joking antagonism between the two clans by appearing in special regalia each time he visits the chief, and threatening him with a broad-bladed fishing spear. On such occasions the Paramount is protected by the head of the dog clan, who has to dance in front of him, pretending to bark in defence of his master. The surrounding courtiers shout the praise names of the fish clan, and encourage the actors. Such a ceremony may be enacted some four or five times during one week during a session of the tribal council. It is never omitted, although performed with diminishing gusto as the week proceeds, and sometimes under modern conditions as a preface to some matter-of-fact discussion of tribal business under the Native Courts Ordinance.

FIG. 1. THE FISH CLAN MEMBER IN REGALIA THREATENING TO SPEAR THE CHIEF, WHO IS SEATED AT THE TOP OF THE MOUND PROTECTED BY THE DOG CLAN MEMBER (STANDING).

614
616
[783]

In spite of the joking hostility, *banungwe* behave to each other with special ease and freedom.[9] They can demand privileges of each other and take each other's possessions. They can swear at each other obscenely (*kutuka nseli*), a form of injury for which the sufferer can claim legal redress as an ordinary rule. It is said that even a commoner may swear at his chief in this

[9] My native clerk, asked to type out some notes on *banungwe*, translated the term as 'totem friends.'

[p. 191(A)]

614 fashion, if the two are *banungwe*, but I never heard this done. A man can also tease his
616 *munungwe's* wife and pretend to make indecent proposals to her. Lastly, *banungwe* may call down curses on each other with impunity
[789] (*kulapishya*, a very serious curse believed to be fatal as among ordinary people). This is done nowadays jokingly at the time of the new moon. Time after time I have heard the crescent moon greeted by shouting children tearing round the village calling the names of their *banungwe*, saying, 'Moon! Come and eat the people of 'such and such a clan!'[10] *Banungwe* are said to be able to take each other's possessions without let or hindrance in joke at the time of the new moon. If a man seizes an axe from the hut of a member of an opposite clan, the owner has to redeem it with 1*s.* or some small coin. Men pretend to raid the huts of their female *banungwe*, and particularly to snatch any objects, clothes, or cooking pots, that may be set to dry on the roofs.[11]

[582] There seems also to be evidence that the *banungwe* relationship was originally associated with reciprocal marriage rights. An intelligent old chief told me, 'Banungwe used to marry each 'other in the old days. It was specially good to 'do so. It was like the marriage of cross-'cousins.' Another elderly informant explained, 'The *Banungwe* are our wives because we knew 'each other a long while ago and because there 'is no in-law avoidance (*mako*) between us. We 'used to exchange each other in the old days.[12] 'That is why there is no *mako*. All those 'women (*i.e.*, the *banungwe*) are our wives.' The younger native does not give a retrospective explanation of this sort but merely laughs and says he can shout at his mother-in-law if he has married a *munungwe*. It does not matter what

[789]

[10] The Bemba usually curse by Leza, the High God, or by the ancestral spirits of dead chiefs. I only heard cursing by the moon on such occasions.

[171] [11] The available data shows us that the Bakaonde also tease members of their opposite clan (*e.g.*, birds and kaffir corn clans, etc.) whom they call *Banungwe*, which Melland translates as 'tease or victim.' He mentions small gifts such as beads, honey, or beer given by the chaffed man to the joker. Melland, *op. cit.*, p. 252. The Lamba clans are paired in opposites known as *awalonga*, some pairs resembling the complementary clans of the Bemba, and Doke states that the opposition between two clans is to-day confined to jesting, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

[12] For exchange he used the reciprocal form of *Kusalushya*—to exchange, *i.e.*, *Kusalushyana*—this word being used for marketing or bartering goods.

614 616 he says to her. There is no *mako*. It is common, too, to hear jokes between men and women in the *bananguse* relationship. To call to a girl of an opposite clan, 'Come here! You, my enemy! 'You, my wife! Come into my hut!' is a favourite form of flirtation.

To summarize, the *bananguse* relationship among the Bemba implies ritual interdependence, a partnership of enemies, expressed in ritual, traditional jokes and freedom in daily intercourse, and preferential marriage claims, no longer exacted, but still reflected in flirtatious behaviour between the two sexes of opposite clans. What seemed to me incomprehensible at first was that a reciprocal clan relationship which prescribed so many types of human behaviour should be based on the apparently arbitrary factor of a clan name and the qualities of the clan object, *e.g.*, the power of the rain to make the mushrooms grow, or the fish spawn. How could the reciprocal responsibility for mortuary ritual and preferential marriage rights between members of opposite clans depend on a system of grouping in which each *mako* had a number of possible *bananguse*, and, as afterwards transpired, its members were often doubtful as to exactly who these were!

Further comparative material will probably throw light on this problem. My own tentative explanation is that the pairing of the clans on the basis of the complementary or hostile nature of the animals or plants they are named after, has been extended far beyond its original use by a process of analogy, and that the introduction of reading and writing has accelerated this extension in an interesting way. I think there is evidence that the *bananguse* were originally pairs of matrilineal clans established in one locality, and that their relationship can only be explained by a knowledge of the Bemba method of conquest of their present territory, and their religious concepts as to the tutelary deities attached to different localities. Tradition describes the first immigration of this tribe from the Congo into their present territory in small lineage groups which settled, grew in numbers, split and then moved on. Sometimes a group found the land empty and sometimes another small band of kinsmen the '*Bena* so and so' were discovered in occupation. In the latter case the new immigrants were dependent, according to Bemba belief, on the first settlers to carry out the rites of propitiation to the ancestral spirits attached to that tract of land. With these prayers for general blessings were often

614 616 173

8: Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1937
FQ5 Bemba FQ5
Bisa

614 associated the duty of burying the chief of the
616 new arrivals, usually the conquering group.
173 This fact is mentioned in a number of legends of the immigration of the Bemba and kindred tribes. The first Citimukulu, or Paramount Chief, is said to have died on the march and was buried by an old man, a member of the millet clan, whom he found in possession of a grove of trees there. A member of the millet clan is still
614 appointed as the *Shimwalule*, or hereditary
616 burier, of the principal chiefs of the Bemba
767 to-day, and he is still responsible for the final and most powerful rain ceremony, when the prayers of the Paramount himself have failed. The mortuary ritual of the Bemba chiefs is so complex, and there are so many hereditary officials responsible for it, that the millet clan are never described simply as the *banungwe* of the royal crocodile clan, but among the kindred Bisa tribes living in smaller groups near L. Bangweolu, we find to-day the hereditary burier of the chief always drawn from one clan and always responsible for the annual prayers for the fertility of the land, his clan definitely described as the first occupiers of the territory, and moreover as the *banungwe* of the royal clan. Thus Chief Matipa on Cilubi Island is buried by the head of the Wild Pig clan (*ngulube*) who are *banungwe* of the royal clan of that island, which is the tree clan (*ngoma*), the descendents of conquering immigrants who arrived about a century ago. This hereditary burier is in charge of the sowing and first-fruit ceremonies in this island and not the chief.

614 This seems to me to throw light on the original
616 pairing of opposite clans. From the same area
173 comes a legend of the successive settlement of
184 two groups which suggest a possible reason why preferential marriage rights should be associated with reciprocal burial duties, or at any rate embodies the traditional native explanation of the custom. The Bisa, living under Chief Nsamba in the L. Bangweolu district say the *Bena Nkashi* (woman's clan), came up the river first to their island. Then the *Bena Mfula* (rain clan) came in canoes. They ate with the *Bena Nkashi* and started to move off. But the head of the local group said, 'Stay here. We are alone here. We 'have no women here. Let us live together.' And the newcomers agreed. So the rain clain gave the sister of their chief in marriage to the head of the woman's clan. When the latter died he had no heirs of his own to bury him, so members of the rain clan buried him. Later another

[p. 192(B)]

614 group of immigrants arrived, the *Bena Nposa*
616 (tree clan, that of the present Bisa chiefs of the
district). They found the rain clan in possession,
184 and begged them to pray to the spirits of the
173 land 'since they were the owners of the land'
and to bury their chiefs. The story ends, 'So
' the rain clan are the priests (*shimisepepo*) here
' to-day. They are the *Bwaangwe* of the woman
' clan. They took their wives from them. They
' are also the *bwaangwe* of the tree clan.'

614 It is impossible to speak with certainty as to
616 the origin of the *Bwaangwe* relationship, but
these living traditions as to the ritual inter-
dependence and marriage exchanges of pairs of
matrilineal lineage groups settled in one locality
in the early days of the occupation of the country
seem to throw out clues. Once the clan names,
usually bestowed as we have seen, from some
legend as to the split or amalgamation of two
local groups, became linked in traditional lin-
guistic forms (praise-names, ceremonial utterances,
formalized jokes, etc.), as complementary or
hostile, the extension of the *bwaangwe* concept
to the classification of other clan objects would
follow readily. I have no evidence that this
process took place in the past, but I have seen
614 it occurring to-day. A native, asked the *bwaangwe*
616 of such and such a clan, gives one or two pairs
automatically, and these are invariably among
811 the oldest clans, with well-known legends of
origin and local centres. Then he stops to think
and adds more names, and then proceeds to
argue with himself, for instance, that if iron is

[p. 193(A)]

8: Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1937
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

614 hostile to the elephant, it must be the enemy
616 of the leopard, the wild pig or the lion too.
[811] This process of extension of the term *banungwe* to all clans named after objects considered complementary or hostile in their nature is seen most strikingly in the case of educated Bemba, who like to make careful lists of all the possible pairs of clans and reach a far greater number than those supplied by an illiterate old native. The fact that the grouping of opposite clans no longer regulates marriage or is based on local residence, but is limited to ceremonial functions and a pleasant teasing form of intercourse, makes this apparently arbitrary classification easier. The fact that it is in the name of the *mukoa* object, together with the traditional fiction of descent in legal affiliation which forms the distinguishing mark of Bemba clan membership rather than local association and ownership of land or property, material or immaterial, also makes it comprehensible that the *banungwe* concept should be readily extended to other clans beyond those first historically paired. Whether a similar process of extension of the paired clan idea took place in the past as each new lineage group grew and became differentiated, it is impossible to know, but it is worth inquiring whether, in contiguous areas where reciprocal clan relationships are found, there are also legends of origin of paired lineage groups, locally associated, with the one dependent on the other to secure the blessings of the Tutelary deities attached to the land.

[p. 193(B)]